



Smart guide

Recruit champions to support your big change

**With advocates on your side,
communication will succeed**



How a champion network can accelerate your company's next change

Significant effort is necessary for change to take root in any organization.

If you want to make change stick, you've got to influence hearts and minds—by sharing a compelling vision that builds knowledge and motivates employees to care.

To do that, you need to engage employees in dialogue, giving people a chance to ask questions, raise concerns and discuss viewpoints.

How can a communicator—or even a team of communicators—lead such profound discussions over a period of months? The fact is, you can't.

That's where change champions come in. Sometimes called change agents or ambassadors, these advocates are selected from across the organization to learn about the change, share news and gather feedback from their colleagues.

Want to build a change champion network to strengthen your communication efforts? Follow this four-step process.

Build a winning change champion program with these four steps:

- 1** Set strong objectives 3
- 2** Select the right mix of champions 4
- 3** Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting 6
- 4** Keep change champions engaged 12



“Identifying influential people who can convert others is crucial for successful change.”

— Julie Battilana and Tiziana Casciaro, *The Network Secrets of Great Change Agents*, Harvard Business Review

1

Set strong objectives

The first step to develop a successful change champion network is to set clear, actionable objectives.

Consider what you're trying to achieve and what communication gaps you need to fill. For example, you may want support to spread key messages across the organization.

Then draft your objectives, and make sure they're **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ctionable, **R**ealistic and **T**imebound. These parameters will help ensure every step you take moves you toward your desired outcome.

It's also helpful to organize your objectives into three buckets

- 1 What you want employees to **know**
- 2 What you want employees to **believe**
- 3 What you want employees to **do**

Here are some common objectives for your change champion program

- Build awareness about the change
- Increase knowledge about what's changing and why
- Gather employee feedback, concerns and questions
- Motivate employees to change their behavior
- Provide a clear point of contact for employees to learn about the change

Once you've developed objectives, keep them front and center so you connect every detail of your program back to your desired end state.

And share objectives with your champions to help them understand their job. You can discuss them during your kick-off meeting (see page 6) and include them in the communication toolkit (see page 12).



“The real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction.”

— John Kotter, *Leading Change*

2

Select the right mix of champions

The first step to develop a successful change champion network is to recruit the right members.

Ideal change champions represent every area of the organization—department, function, role or location—so they can influence change across every layer.

A great team includes a healthy mix of frontline, mid-level and senior colleagues with a broad range of skills. Members should be trusted by leadership and have the ear and the confidence of their peers.

According to John Kotter, author of *Leading Change*, “You need both management and leadership skills... . The former keeps the whole process under control, while the latter drives the change.”



How many team members do you need?

The short answer: it depends. Here are some guidelines:

- At least one champion from each business and functional unit in your company
 - For larger departments, you may want two or even three champions
- At least one champion for every major location

In small organizations, as few as 10 total champions may be sufficient. In larger enterprises, you might need 50 or more to ensure you have plenty of bench strength.



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2. Select the right mix of champions (continued)

What attributes should a change champion have?

- ✓ Articulate
- ✓ Enthusiastic
- ✓ Approachable
- ✓ Comfortable interacting with others
- ✓ Influential
- ✓ Knowledgeable about the organization
- ✓ Well networked
- ✓ Able to dedicate time to support the initiative

So how do you find these people? Walk the floor and ask colleagues who they go to for advice or the latest department news. Invite managers to nominate their most trusted, well-respected team members. And once you find those employees, ask for their recommendations.



How do you convince employees to become change champions?

Most enthusiastic employees will jump at the chance to take on a high-visibility change management role. But some may hesitate based on time commitment or other concerns.

Explain to holdouts that rewards for participation are great

- The chance to collaborate with talented colleagues from across the organization
- An opportunity for more visibility
- Appreciation from project leaders
- Skills development
- Potential path toward job advancement

3

Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting

Once you've determined who to include in your network, it's time to get team members acquainted with each other and equip them for the work ahead.

First, send your recruits an invitation asking them to join the network. Include context to emphasize the role's importance, a brief description of what the role will entail and clear guidance on the time commitment required. Give your invitees a chance to accept or decline your offer without judgment.

The kick-off meeting

Plan an interactive session that gets champions involved in determining how to communicate the change. The more people feel included in the process, the more they will feel ownership of the plan and their role in communicating the change.

A kickoff is a great opportunity to build alignment and prepare for consistent communication. A well-planned meeting will help champions:

- ✓ Become comfortable working together
- ✓ Have an opportunity to ask questions and contribute ideas
- ✓ Build alignment so they can communicate cohesively
- ✓ Feel motivated to take action



Build a strong agenda

Set clear objectives for your meeting, then plan your agenda to fulfill those objectives. **Here's what you should aim to achieve:**

- Educate champions about the change
- Build belief in the importance of communication—and in the champion network's role
- Clearly define the role
- Provide access to communication tools

Notice how these sample objectives align with those on page 3.

3. Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting (continued)

Your session should accomplish the following so champions are well equipped to perform their role:

- A Explain the network's importance
- B Define the role
- C Provide communication tools

We'll explain how to achieve these objectives over the following pages.



If you can, build your agenda to devote at least one-third of the time to participation. That means going beyond asking, "Are there any questions?"

Instead, stimulate discussion by posing smart questions and allowing plenty of time to explore them. And plan exercises that allow champions to practice their communication skills or discuss which communication tactics resonate best with their colleagues.



Great meetings do this...	Not this...
Increase knowledge, answer questions, solve problems, motivate employees to take action	Only share information
Include dialogue and interaction	Include only speakers, videos and a small window for Q&A
Create an "ah-ha" moment that employees can share after the meeting	Create a forgettable meeting

"The truth is that small groups, loosely connected, but united by a shared purpose drive transformational change."

— Greg Satell, *Why Change Management Efforts Fail So Consistently, Inc.*

3. Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting (continued)

A Explain the network's importance

A critical part of your kickoff is to explain the importance of the change champion role. This context will both build champions' pride and motivate them to action.

So why is a network key to accelerating change?

We know champions can extend the project team's reach by connecting directly with colleagues in their departments. But there's much more to gain from enlisting a team of advocates.

Explain that change champions will help the organization:

Gain employees' support. People are most influenced by their peers and those they trust. When a colleague from someone's own department or career level tells personal stories about the change, this builds a connection between individuals. Compound this across change champions and departments, and you'll see how your team can promote understanding in every business area.

Get candid feedback. Some employees find it easier to talk to peers than leaders. That's where champions come in. They act as the "pulse" for the organization, enabling people who otherwise might have stayed silent to open up. As a result, champions can report back to leadership with questions, comments and concerns that might have gone uncovered.

Reduce gossip. When a big change happens, whispers start to trickle down. Because your many champions are more likely to hear these rumors than your small project leadership team, these advocates are in a better position to stop the trickle from becoming a flood. When armed with the right information, champions can help counter rumors with facts to educate employees.

Influence attitudes through conversation. Champions provide employees with an opportunity to discuss the change with a respected colleague. This helps to naturally move employees through the change curve from denial and anger to acceptance and buy-in.



“Most human beings, especially well-educated ones, buy into something only after they have had a chance to wrestle with it. Wrestling means asking questions, challenging and arguing.”

— John Kotter, *Leading Change*

3. Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting (continued)

B Define the role

Teams collaborate effectively when members understand their responsibilities and are prepared to perform. That's why it's critical to clearly define the role during your kick-off meeting.

Be sure to explain who champions report to, who they should communicate with inside their business or function, and what they need to accomplish.

Change champion responsibilities often include:

- ✓ Becoming knowledgeable about the details and importance of the change
- ✓ Building awareness and understanding about the change in their business areas by sharing communication
 - This may include sending emails, scheduling meetings, sharing key messages at staff meetings and engaging on company intranet pages
- ✓ Providing resources to help employees learn more about the change
- ✓ Customizing content for different functions, regions or locations
- ✓ Countering rumors with facts
- ✓ Sharing energy and enthusiasm
- ✓ Answering employees' questions and referring them to resources
- ✓ Listening and gathering feedback from employees
- ✓ Identifying knowledge gaps



“In ambiguous situations, we all look to others for cues about how to behave.”

— Chip and Dan Heath, *Switch*

3. Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting (continued)

C Provide communication tools

For change champions to reach peak performance, they need to be equipped with the right tools. An important part of your job is to coach champions so they have the information and resources they need to be successful.

How do I set up change champions for success?

Start by developing a toolkit that provides champions the foundational materials they'll need to excel. Introduce the toolkit at your kick-off meeting, then provide champions access to the tools and resources via email.

An effective toolkit includes:

- **Overview of the role.** Provide clear instructions so champions know what to do (see page 9).
- **Overview of the change.** Help champions understand the change so they can speak knowledgeably about it. Answer the five Ws and H: What's changing, why, when, to whom, where (if applicable) and how it will happen. If possible, include a timeline with key milestones—this will help champions visualize the change so they can explain it well.
- **Key messages.** Provide agreed-upon language so champions can speak consistently about the change.
- **FAQs.** Give champions the answers to common questions so they're prepared to answer. Be sure to update FAQs regularly so the latest information is always available.
- **Presentation deck with talking points.** Make it easy to present the change to colleagues. Give champions core PowerPoint® slides so they can speak at staff meetings.
- **Tips on how to communicate.** Champions are probably not trained communicators! They'll need your coaching and guidance to do the job well.



“A strong guiding coalition is always needed—one with the right composition, level of trust and shared objective. Building such a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort.”

— John Kotter, Leading Change

3. Prep your team by holding a kick-off meeting (continued)

C Provide communication tools (continued)

Here's an example of communication advice you can provide to your champion network.

Tips for communicating

Part of your role in communicating includes periodic, short chats with members of your team. As a champion, you need to set the example and take the time to hold those conversations whenever they come up.

Here are a few tips:

- **Be prepared**—have some personal stories in your back pocket, ready to tell a colleague whenever the moment occurs.
 - Hearing a colleague tell a story about why the change is critical to the company's success will mean more to employees than reading about it in a newsletter or other vehicle.
- **Make sure you're available** to hear your team's opinions and questions, but more importantly, pay attention and really listen.
 - Letting people give voice to their anxieties has been proven by researchers to release tension.
- **Inform your colleagues** on a regular basis. Keep them in the loop and explain the details. The more information you supply, the less misinformation will circulate.
- **Answer difficult questions.**
 - If you don't have the information to respond, it's okay to say, "I don't know," but also pledge to provide answers as soon as you can.
- **Counter rumors** with information.
 - Although you can't eliminate rumors, you can contain them by encouraging your team members to share their concerns with you, and answering their questions as thoroughly as possible.



4

Keep change champions engaged

Employ diverse tactics to keep champions updated and motivated. **Here are some ideas:**

- **E-newsletter:** Distribute a weekly newsletter with a quick summary of recent achievements and upcoming milestones. Include links to important resources and call out action items so they're noticeable and clear.
- **In-person and/or web meetings:** Schedule a monthly forum so champions have an opportunity to share feedback and ask questions real time. This is also a great environment to share best practices, discuss challenges, practice communication techniques and have project experts explain key points. Be sure to keep your agendas interactive and productive.

Sample meeting agenda

Time	Topic	Detail
5 min.	Open meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review agenda
10 min.	Project update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project status • Milestones achieved • Upcoming events
5 min.	Open action items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on action items from last meeting
20 min.	Communication tip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share tip (how to manage negativity) • Activity: Role play
15 min.	Actions needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review action items for champions to perform during next week/month • Discuss any concerns or questions champions may have
5 min.	Close meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind where to find resources • Save the date for next meeting



4. Keep change champions engaged (continued)

- **FAQ updates:** Update FAQs regularly and share those with champions via email, intranet and/or meetings. One of the best ways to develop FAQs is to solicit questions from employees themselves. So provide champions with an email address or online form to submit common questions they've received. Then add those to the next FAQ version.
- **Intranet site:** Develop an intranet landing page champions can visit to access all the resources and information they need. Post the toolkit, FAQs and core presentation, as well as the latest project news, a calendar of events, and contact information for project leads. Consider adding a chat feature so champions can discuss their challenges, share successes and answer each other's questions. This will promote camaraderie and connection among the team while boosting skills and knowledge.
- **Surveys:** Consider running periodic spot surveys to ensure champions are getting the support they need to perform their role. Ask questions like:

Rate your level of agreement with the following statement:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I understand my role as a champion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have the tools I need to communicate about the change with my colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to handle rumors about the change.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



“The first step in creating large-scale change is to start thinking about where to target your efforts... . Start mobilizing the most enthusiastic supporters to start influencing the other groups to shift their opinions.”

— Greg Satell, *Why Change Management Efforts Fail So Consistently*, Inc.

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Take change communication to the next level.

We can help you to:

- Develop an effective change champion strategy
- Set **SMART** objectives to guide your program
- Recruit the right team members
- Equip champions to accelerate your change initiative

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Global. We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).



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